T.I. Gives 'Rappin' Fool' Eminem A 'T.I.P.' About Alter Egos

'T.I. is trying to tell Marshall [Mathers] how to deal with Slim based on how he deals with Tip,' rapper reveals about new song.
By Shaheem Reid
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ATLANTA – No doubt about it: The side of Clifford Harris that came out during a recent interview was his more boisterous half, Tip. He had the floor – and a few heated words to share about the recent controversy over rap lyrics.

"You ain't bringing Martin Scorsese up for 'The Departed'? He won an Academy Award," the man most commonly referred to as T.I. said, citing the violent film. His voice escalating from his usually laid-back tone to stirring and riled up, the rapper was upset about the portrayal of rap music in the media as of late. He wanted to know why rap is being singled out in the wake of Don Imus' firing (see [article id="1557857"]"Hip-Hop Hits Back At Imus, Critics: T.I., Snoop, Fat Joe, Common Weigh In"[/article]).

"[In the movie], they threw a white man out a window ... shot so many people," he continued. "Ain't nobody bringing these people up because ['The Departed'] was artistically done, it was very creative. Everyone went to the movie and they enjoyed it. What about ... 'Saw,' 'Saw 2' and '3'?

But aside from Tip's anger over the flak that rap has been drawing lately, the mood at his Grand Hustle studios was actually filled with camaraderie. Even after losing a game of pool, Tip kept his smile. Young Dro, checking on a song Tip approved, started a spontaneous freestyle session. And later, the studio engineer got a much-deserved break, feasting his eyes instead on T-Pain and Pretty Ricky videos.

"I never get a chance to watch any TV," Tip said as one of the models in Pain's "Buy You a Drank (Shawty Snappin')" video showed that, yes, the snap dance can be done in high heels. "Is this what I've been missing?"

T.I.'s recording schedule doesn't know any pace other than full steam ahead. Unlike a lot of artists, he doesn't have a "cycle": There's no chilling for a couple of years after an album is done being promoted. He always has an album out, and while *T.I. vs. T.I.P.* is set to drop July 3, 2006's *King* is still getting titanic spins on radio. As he did with *King*, T.I. has recorded in excess of 60 songs for *T.I. vs. T.I.P.* and is still laying tracks for it (see [article id="1554945"]"T.I. Taking On *T.I.P.* With Help From Eminem, Justin Timberlake"[/article]).

If you haven't heard this for the millionth time, T.I. is the rapper's more laid-back, business-savvy side, while Tip is his uncut, raw incarnation. Both have taken the forefront on his records, occasionally bumping heads on a song here and there.

"All the albums prior to this one, Tip would work harder to make the album, T.I. would work harder to sell it," he said. On *T.I. vs. T.I.P.* – a conceptual LP about his life – they get at it on six tracks. Another third of the project is dedicated solely to T.I. and the remainder goes to Tip.

"This is my life, this is the struggle I had to go through to bring myself to release another album," said T.I., who lost both his newborn daughter and personal assistant within the last year (see [article id="1530402"]"Deadly Shooting Causes T.I. To Re-Evaluate His Life" [/article]). "After all the stuff I went through following the success of *King*, it took a lot to even muster the effort or even care enough about the world outside my circle to even care about doing another album. ... All I did was take notes and record it along the way."

One of the more recent sessions he held for the album was with Eminem, someone who has his own dual-identity issues.

"It was an experience," T.I. said about working with Em. "He's probably one of the most lyrical cats in the game right now. Me being known as one of the most lyrical cats in the game, I had to get myself up. He lived up to all my expectations. He's a rappin' fool. He made me step my game up.

"We did three records," he continued. "One we did for him. You know how Marshall Mathers and Slim Shady have their beefs? Well [on that song], T.I. is trying to tell Marshall how to deal with Slim based on how he deals with Tip. Then Tip butts in, like, 'You can't tell nobody nothing.' Then Em comes in and tells me, 'Who are you to tell me anything?' I was like, 'I'm just trying to help, homie.' "

Their other two collaborations could end up on *T.I. vs. T.I.P.*, including a song called "Touchdown."

"It's out of Eminem's norm, if Eminem has a norm," T.I. said of the track. "It's a record you wouldn't expect to hear him on, kinda like how you heard [him] on 'Smack That' for Akon or [Em's] 'Shake That' with Nate Dogg. You'll be like, 'OK, he's switching it up.' ['Touchdown' is] basically [him] talking about when you touch down in everybody's city, what you do. Hit the mall, buy a car or leave the club with all the girls. We have yet to finish that one.

"The one we finished is 'Whatever You Want It to Be,' " he added. "It's saying, 'I'm a man, if I ain't nothing else. Before I'm a rapper, before I'm anything else, I'm a man. If you don't respect that, it can be whatever you want it to be.' "

The producer Tip went the most in-depth with for this project, however, was – of all people – Wyclef Jean. It has yet to be determined if all their records will make the cut, but two front-runners are "Swagger" and "U Know What It Is."

"You can quote me," Tip burst out with a grin. " 'U Know What It Is' will tear the clubs up this summer."

"Had the album of the year, Grammy or not," he raps on the song. "Frank Lucas [Denzel Washington's character in 'American Gangster'] ain't the only one who made a million. You got the real American gangsta right here in your face."

"Me and 'Clef got together over a weekend," he explained about the collaborations. "We wasn't on each other's itinerary to work with each other. He hit me one day when I was in L.A. and was like, 'I gotta come to Atlanta. You got anywhere I can record?' "

T.I. graciously turned over the main room in his studio and it was on from there. T.I. came home about a day into Wyclef's sessions and immediately started snatching up tracks for himself.

"He started pulling up [beats] and I was like, 'Who is that for?' He said, 'You, if you want it.' We wound up knocking seven songs from Friday to Monday. It's just us having a good time. We just bonded."

"Show It 2 Me," which features Nelly, sounds like it could easily be a sequel to their previous teaming on *Urban Legend*'s "Get Loose." The two go back and forth at points and Nelly uses an old-school flow like UTFO on "Roxanne Roxanne." Lil Wayne appears on "Yeah" and drops lines such as, "I'm flyer than a vampire."

Andre 3000 could also possibly check in, on a song called "Life of the Party." On that track, Tip talks about maturity, why he's now "too grown to be the life of the party," and how he has no time to argue with bouncers, overzealous fans or pestering playa haters.

"Listen, buddy, you're way too close to me," he raps.

Of course, you should have already heard Mannie Fresh chiming in on "Big Things Poppin'," which is already on the radio (see [article id="1556878"]"T.I. Has 'Big Things Poppin' ' With Mannie Fresh, Himself On *T.I./T.*"[/article]).

"A lot of energy," T.I. said about what the former Cash Money Millionaire brings to the table. "Fresh is a cool cat, one of the coolest. One of the most down-to-earth, well-rounded cats I've met in music. ... He ain't trippin' off no fame. He's coming in to make music, have a good time, enjoy himself as long as he can, and when he gets sleepy, he's going home. It ain't a bunch of politics going on.

" 'Big Things Poppin',' it's about the quest for the finest things in life and ignorance of the smaller things," he smiled. "I ain't doing nothing small. If I buy a car, I'm buying the biggest car on the lot for the simple fact that I've got 17 cars. So what am I buying another car for unless it's the best car on the lot? If I'm going out, I'm going to the best club in town. If I'mma go shopping, I'm gonna go tear the mall down. Why? Because I'm in a position to do so."

Ultimately, T.I. and his alter ego meet up on a few records, such as "Respect the Hustle."

"It's basically T.I. and Tip telling each other, 'Let me do what I do, you do what you do,' " he explained. "T.I. tells Tip, 'I don't knock you when you trying to do records like 'Top Back,' 'What You Know,' so don't knock me when I wanna do 'Why You Wanna.' If I want to go to Hawaii and be on the beach, why do I have to come back and explain myself? They're basically trying to find a understanding of each other."

Jay-Z, Justin Timberlake and Timbaland are all also scheduled to appear on the set, while Akon, Scott Storch and Danja have already performed and produced for the album.